A HISTORY OF DAVIS HOSPITAL

by

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History of Medicine
June 3, 1969

> With the removal, the latter part of this week, of the Davis Hospital from South Center Street to its handsome new building on West End Avenue, there is opened in Statesville a thoroughly equipped new hospital. Of the most approved design and construction and with scientific equipment in every department, the new hospital is one of the most modern and completely equipped institutions of this type in North Carolina.
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> "Statesville Has a New Hospital"
> The Landmark
> December 17, 1925

So begins the history of Davis Hospital, conceived in the boyhood dreams of Dr. James Wagner Davis, established January 10, 1923.and opening its doors to receive patients on December 18, 1925. In 1914, following his internship at Robert Packer Hospital in Sayre, Pennsylvania Dr. Davis returned to Statesville to accept a position on the staff of Long's Hospital. (When the new county hospital was erected on the edge of town, this hospital was closed and taken over by the County Welfare Department for which purpose it is used today.) However, according to his biographer, LeGette Blythe, the young doctor was never completely satisfied there. The senior Dr. Long continued to do the more complicated surgery and Dr. Davis felt as though he were being denied the chance to develop his own surgical skills. It is interesting to note that at Davis Hospital many years later, this same criticism was leveled at Dr. Davis by the younger surgeons on his staff.

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When the United States entered World War I in April, 1917 Dr. Davis was still on the staff of Long's Hospital. Already eager to establish his

own institution he decided to enter the Medical Corps of the Army and on January 14, 1918 the young Statesville surgeon was ordered to active duty. During his military career he served with the American Expeditionary Forces in France and the United States Military Mission in Germany. In his later years Dr. Davis spoke often of the friendships he had made in France and Germany, and he frequently corresponded with those acquaintances. There was one phase of his military history that he never discussed in detail, nor did the Department of the Army choose to record it. It concerned a highly confidential mission to Russia with orders to confer with certain Russian leaders most notably Lenin and Trotsky. In a letter dated November 10,1954 written to Senator Arthur V. Watkins in defense of Senator Joseph McCarthy, Dr. Davis referred cautiously to his mission in Russia. Exerpts from this letter appear in the text of Mr. Blythe's book James W. Davis - North Carolina Surgeon.

> " I served my country in the first World War, was overseas for a long time and spent about a year with the Russians in Germany and in Russia with the headquarters in Berlin... My duty there was as surgeon with a small group known as the American Military Mission and also other duties which were assigned me verbally by General Pershing and of which I cannot speak, but I can tell you that I was trusted with a mission and was the only one in this group who was assigned to this special mission which required risking my life and required the use of tact, courage, and every faculty I had in order to accomplish satisfactorily the task to which I was assigned and which, as I said, was a confidential one and which I was told, after I successfully completed this, that the President, Mr. Lansing and Col. House said they were sorry that it was impossible for them to give me adequate recognition for the service which I had rendered America in one of the most difficult and trying assignments that has ever been given an American officer in a foreign country among strange people, because it was so confidential that only verbal orders were issued about this and had I been lost or liquidated in the performance of this duty nothing would have been said about it. "

The letter, however neither explained the purpose of the mission nor disclosed its findings, but one can be sure that Dr. Davis's firsthand

dealings with communism had a profound influence on his political policies just as the purpose of the letter indicated. His stand against socialism based on that mission led him to actively oppose,thirty years later, the Truman Administration's attempt to socialize medicine under the form of House Bill No. 5940. Senate Bill No. 1453 a similar measure, had already been passed without any opposition. On October 12, 1949, Dr. Davis and Dr. L.B. Skeen of Mooresville accompanied by six registered nurses and backed by Congressman Robert L. Doughton, of North Carolina, appeared before the House Rules Committee and presented their arguments against the bill. After the hearing the committee killed the bill which within twenty-four hours would have been placed before the United States House of Representatives - with socialization of medicine, dentistry, and nursing and the end of every three year nursing school in the United States in the balance.

The effect of this mission was also felt on the local level, in the principles upon which Davis Hospital was founded and operates today. He bitterly opposed anything that smacked of socialism - an opposition that seemed to underly his philosophy. Independence and free enterprise became the two principles which guided him. Even today Davis Hospital prides itself in being self supporting, and has to date never accepted any local, state, or federal aid.

In 1919 after his discharge from the army, Dr. Davis returned to Statesville, only to discover his position at Long's Hospital had been filled. He was, therefore, confronted with the challenge of building new hospital facilities, or of moving on, possibly even to South America to practice surgery. At that time in Statesville, the late Dr. F.A. Carpenter was active in eye, ear, nose and throat practice. He performed tonsil-

lectomies, etc. in his office over what is now Holmes Drug Store. In 1919 the custom was for one doctor to have one office of two or three rooms, one attendant, and a T-model Ford to make calls in. Dr. Davis chose to change this by establishing a group arrangement with assistants, nurses, technicians, and associate doctors. As a result, on January 1, 1920, Dr. Davis and Dr. Carpenter opened the Carpenter-Davis Hospital, a brick structure on South Center Street, now the Carolina Hotel. The arrangements made between the two physicians regarding its establishment were not recorded.

In May of the same year the thirty-five bed hospital started the School of Nursing with three young ladies in the freshman class. Miss Elizabeth Hill a graduate of Mitchell College and the School of Nursing at Charlotte Sanatorium (today Charlotte Memorial Hospital) was the "entire nursing staff" when the hospital opened, and it was under her direction that the nursing school was organized. She is still with Davis Hospital as Superintendent of Nurses. Today the School of Nursing has a capacity of 75 students in three classes. In its forty-nine year history the School has graduated over 500 nurses many of whom have remained in Northwest North Carolina, an area one third that of the whole state supplied by only four nursing schools. On Friday evening, May 23 of this year Miss Hill presented the Nursing pins to each of the 15 candidates in the class of 1969. Having first awarded these to the three young ladies in the class of 1923, she marks her 47th graduation exercise this year.

About the second year of operation Dr. Carpenter became sick and died leaving the full burden on Dr. Davis. He continued to operate the Carpenter-Davis Hospital, but all the while made plans for his own institution. The site he chose was a cow pasture adjacent to and west

of the Wagner homestead on West End Avenue, his grandmother's home. Though he grew up in the Goshen Community of Wilkes County Dr. Davis was born in the old Wagner home in 1886, and had often played and hunted in the fields and pasture that were to become the lawn of a 250 bed hospital. In 1924 he acquired the title to the property and after securing a loan from his uncle "Clint" Wagner to supplement what funds he had, he employed John Gilbert, a Statesville contractor to begin construction of the plant.

The steel and reinforced concrete, brick veneer structure was completed late in the fall of 1925 at a cost of $80,000. The fifty-bed unit included four stories and a basement, fireproof and soundproof according to The Landmark that opening day. The first floor included a reception room, executive office, EENT Department, examining rooms, clinical laboratories, a minor operating room, and an X-ray room. The latter was "complete in every detail" with a ten inch X-ray machine whose transformer was located in the basement "to eliminate noise from the X-ray room." A radiographscope invented by a North Carolina physician for viewing X-ray films stereoptically was one of the first to be placed in a hospital in North Carolina. The basement housed the furnace room, laundry, nurses' classroom, nurses' dining room, a large kitchen "with modern equipment and a dishwasher," pantries, and cold storage room, servants' dining room, and a diet kitchen connected by an electrical dumbwaiter with the diet kitchen in the patients' department on the second and third floors. Convenient innovations included a linen shute and a dust shute.

Patients' departments and operating rooms were located on the second and third floors. Here, there were accomodations for fifty patients, with each room completely furnished with steel furniture with a mahogany

finish. Fourteen of the rooms had a connecting bath while all were equipped with a new electrical silent-signal system which replaced the old call bell. The operating suites on the third floor were composed of an obstetric room , two fully-equipped operating rooms and an adjoining sterilization room.

On the fourth floor were located a reception room and "cheerful sun parlors." A small bronze tablet on the door of this room recorded that it was furnished by a Mr. and Mrs. Floyd Holman of Wilkesboro in memory of their son, John Rufus, a veteran of the World War. Opening onto the fourth floor was a roof garden overlooking the city "and affording on clear days a magnificent view of the mountains in the distance."

Anyone who has visited Davis Hospital and chosen to use the stairs has no doubt noticed the oddly constructed stairway running from the basement to the top floor in the main building. It was designed by a Mr. U.A. Ostwalt and considered at the time a remarkable piece of engineering. Additional features included three radio-receiving stations which could be connected with a loud speaking circuit or a phonograph, an electric elevator connecting all floors, an intercommunicating telephone system, and drinking fountains on each floor.

The staff that opening day included three other physicians in addition to the chief of staff, Dr. Davis: Dr. V.K. Hart, EENT; Dr. C.R. Toy, house physician; and Dr. S.A. Rhyne, radiologist. Miss Hill had also come with Dr. Davis to the new facility as head surgical nurse and superintendent of the training school. There were seventeen student nurses enrolled and they were housed in the Wagner home next door to

the hospital where Dr. Davis's mother then lived. Miss Mary Lee Yates listed in 1925 as assistant nurse in Eye, Ear,Nose and Throat later became assistant secretary and treasurer of the institution.

In 1930 Dr. Lloyd R. Shaw, a graduate of Wake Forest College and the Medical College of Virginia and an Iredell County native, joined the hospital as chief of the department of obstetrics,a position he holds today. It was also in 1930 that Dr. J.Sam Solbrook a native of Wilkes County spent his summer working in the laboratory of the fifty bed hospital four years prior to joining the staff as a full time physician in internal medicine.

From the opening day in 1925, the patient load on Davis Hospital began to grow. The hospital drew from many of the surrounding counties;; in addition to Iredell, there were Wilkes, Catawba, Alexander, Caldwell, Rowan, Mecklenberg, Yancy, Mitchell, and Avery Counties. It soon became evident that more room would be needed, the first of ten major additions to the original structure. The plans were drawn, construction started and in 1930 the new wing opened. It was an L-shaped structure added to the rear of the main building. It housed expanded dining and kitchen facilities, lounges, dressing rooms, and showers for Negro personnel in the basement. Above this were two floors with forty beds bringing the total capacity to ninety. During this rapid growth as his professional staff increased, Dr. Davis saw the need for available housing and the need for this housing to be close to the institution. As a result, the hospital today owns considerable real estate in the neighborhood, some of which houses the staff members.

In 1934, after having spent two years in hospital training in Philadelphia and New Orleans, Dr. Holbrook joined the staff of four full-time physicians. During the next fifteen years, the need for additional facilities became progressively more acute, and in 1949 construction was begun on the Maternity Wing which opened the following year with Dr. Shaw in charge. It provided a new delivery room, labor rooms, a nursery, physicians' offices, a waiting room, and beds for thirty-five medical and surgical patients. The wing was added to the western end of the 1930 addition. In 1951 further room was made by building a third floor to the 1930 addition, adjoining the surgical facilities on the third floor of the main building. This made a total of four complete operating rooms - two in the original structure, one converted from the original delivery room, and the room on this new floor. This completely air-conditioned and modernly equipped facility opened in 1952.

It is interesting to note that in 1951 when Dr. Myers, an inspector from the American College of Surgeons for the joint commission, passed on the entire facilities, he stated that in no place in Boston, his hometown, were there then any operating suites superior to those built in 1951.

The most significant and largest addition to the main building was yet to come. Dr. Davis foresaw the day when Statesville and the surrounding area would need a complete diagnostic clinic to fill the needs of people of average means. It was his greatest ambition, but one which he would not live to see fulfilled. He designed it, awarded the contract, and watched it progress until three months before it

would open. This was the East Wing or Diagnostic Clinic. Completed in September of 1955, it sits on the location of the old Wagner house, where Dr. Davis was born. To enter the main doors one walks up the walkway which formerly led to Mrs. Wagner's front door. As the program for the Dedication Ceremony on September 11 stated, "The building included a full basement housing a records room, physiotherapy department, cystoscopic room with additional urological examination facilities, orthopedic room with X-ray facilities for use in this department and auxiliary to the other X-ray department in the hospital, the isotope room, and the machine room for air-conditioning equipment for the entire building. The first floor is composed of a reception room, doctors' offices, business offices, and examining rooms. The second and third floors contain twenty-nine beds each bringing the capacity in 1955 to 200 beds.

A few months afterward, the X-ray equipment in the main building was moved to the new basement utilizing the auxiliary X-ray equipment already there and the isotope room for radiological studies. Two years later in the late 1950's the kitchen and the dining area were expanded southward and a Pediatrics Department of about twenty-nine beds built over it as a continuation of the first floor. It was in the 1950's that the recovery room became a necessary and required part of the American Hospital, and thus a part of Davis Hospital. In 1959 the Surgical Clinic was completed providing a lobby, offices, and examining rooms on the ground floor, an expansion of the EENT Department headed by Dr. J.R. Stewart on the first floor, a Coronary Care Unit on the second, and the Recovery Room on the third floor. In the recovery room there was space for eight patients with oxygen and suction at every bed.

That same year, the old Emergency Room was remodeled.

The latest addition to the Hospital is the Woman's Division. Up to 1963, Dr. Shaw and his house staff were using the ground floor of the Obstetrical Wing as office space. In order to provide additional facilities for obstetrics and gynecology and office area for another specialist in that field the second largest expansion was begun and completed in 1963. Added to the western side of the existing structure, it brought the total bed capacity to 250. The first floor houses a lobby, examining and treatment rooms, dressing rooms, and doctors' offices. On the second floor there are delivery rooms with two of these private and one semi-private, making a total of four labor beds. There are also doctors' and nurses' lounges and two nurseries with twelve bassinets each. On the same floor is an isolation nursery and a formular room. The nursery is divided into three parts: one regular, one for premature infants,and a third for sick infants which is rarely used. The patient recovery rooms including both private and semi-private facilities are located on the third floor. Two of the ten examining rooms are now used for a clinical laboratory and a cytology laboratory staffed by technicians for those particular studies. Construction is now underway on yet another addition with completion planned this year. As far back as the early 1960's the most essential thing considered was a new X-ray department, but the Woman's Division took priority at the time and subsequently forced the postponement of new X-ray facilities. Today the volume and responsibility of the Radiology Department have outgrown its present facilities. The new structure will be located between the East Wing and the main building and provide four diagnostic X-ray rooms with adjoining baths and waiting areas.

It will be close to the Emergency Room to facilitate its frequent use by that department.

In a day of spiraling hospitalization costs, inflation, and cut-backs in federal and state subsidies, the future of the small private hospital is imperiled - not so for Davis Hospital. Throughout its forty-four years, it has remained solvent and staunchly independent and has managed to avoid any serious financial difficulties. The clinic and hospital are run almost entirely on patient fees, yet today the cost per day for the patient is only slightly above $30.00. When asked how this was accomplished in an interview for a newspaper feature, Dr, Holbrook replied, " By hard work; we work a little harder, and we work for a little less... We cut out the dead wood in our operating costs...we achieve a high degree of efficiency in all we do. " The hospital also saves by running its own laundry built in 1952.

The principles of private enterprise, individual initiative, and hard workwhich Dr. Davis believed in so wholeheartedly are the backbone of the hospital's operation today. The hospital has accepted only two grants, both from private foundations. Ford Foundation one year gave $ 70,000 which was used in construction of the nurses' home and classrooms built in 1953 and then expanded in 1956. At the time of this latter expansion the Reynolds Foundation gave a sum of approximately $ 34,000. Even though the state refunds the hospital $100 annually for each student enrolled, the cost of operation of the School of Nursing is approximately $ 75,000 per year. There was a time when the student nurses returned a great deal of this expense in their services, but in recent years they have not been permitted to render service to compensate for their keep and instruction. Without

the School of Nursing; however, the administration fears they could never hope to have enough staff nurses to provide adequate care due to a widespread shortage of nursing personnel. Consequently the school must remain in operation to insure a perpetual nursing staff for this and other Northwest North Carolina hospitals.

Thus the entire hospital is forced to operate efficiently and effectively and to avoid oversophistication. The hospital does not buy every new product on the market, but purchases what it needs and what it can pay for. To date there has been no government money, county, state, or federal, in the program. Davis Hospital, however, holds a trump, the Wagner Foundation, valued at three quarters of a million dollars. As was previously mentioned, the original building was built by Dr. Davis with the support of his uncle, "Clint" Wagner, who throughout his lifetime took a great deal of pride in the service rendered by Davis Hospital. The late Mr. Wagner left his entire life's savings "to see that there was always a Davis Hospital to serve humanity!" The Foundation is a bulwark or endowment to assure the hospital of continuous operation under severe conditions. It is not used for operating expenses under ordinary circumstances.

The hospital, until 1937, was privately owned by the late Dr. Davis. That year he gave it away to a nonprofit corporation. Each year afterward he put back into the corporation all his earnings and for a number of years he drew only a dollar annually from it. Prior to his death on May 31, 1955 he had secured Dr. Holbrook's committment to continue the service and quality of Davis Hospital, Inc. As Dr. Holbrook says today, "This we have tried to do."

Dr. Holbrook speaks of the operation of the hospital in three phases, the first being the schools of paramedical education. In addition to the School of Nursing recognized by the National League of Nursing, there is a School of X-ray Technology, and although no formal school exists for this purpose, the hospital has trained a large number of laboratory technicians through the years. Each spring Miss Hill has one graduate and one resident nurse to devote much of their time to the teaching and training of qualified women to become nurses' aides. This requires several weeks of study before they can be of service to the nurses on the floor.

The second phase of operation is the Clinic and Outpatient Department. This is subdivided into several specialties and subspecialties. The Medical Clinic is staffed by five physicians, three internists, and two general practitioners, five nurses, and a number of aides and technicians. In this department is the electrocardiographic equipment and the heart station. The Surgical Clinic and Emergency Room work jointly with two or three surgeons, six nurses, a number of aides, and a receptionist. It houses many features for management of emergency problems. There is a Urological Clinic with special hours and days for outpatient visits. The Orthopedic Clinic is held in the Physical Therapy Department, and serves inpatients, outpatients, and office referrals. Two pediatricians, two receptionists, and three nurses staff the Pediatric Department. The EENT Clinic is staffed by one specialist, three registered nurses trained in EENT, and a receptionist. They are equipped to handle both outpatients and house cases for examination and treatment. The Obstetrics-Gynecology Clinic is housed in the Woman's Division and staffed by three specialists.

In the summer of 1930 when Dr. Holbrook first worked at Davis Hospital in the Clinical Pathology Laboratory it consisted of one small room. In the expansion of that year two large rooms were added to this and today seven technicians operate the facilities provided in these three main rooms. In 1967 an additional laboratory with one technician was set up between the Pediatrics Department and the Woman's Division to do their outpatient work, thus making it more convenient to the patients and giving more prompt results to the physicians. A screening laboratory staffed by one technician for cytological work is located on the same floor. Questionable smears are sent to the Department of Pathology of Bowman Gray School of Medicine, a service begun in 1930 when Dr. C.C. Carpenter started doing the surgical pathology for the late Dr. Davis. Since that time Dr. Carpenter and his successors have continued to be the consultants in surgical and clinical pathology. Prior to the Vietnam call-up, Dr. E.R. Caldwell, who joined the staff in 1952, was the director of the Clinical Laboratory and supervised the laboratory personnel. Presently one of the pathology residents at Bowman Gray spends the greater part of a day each week at Davis Hospital in consultation with technicians and staff members, a service of proven worth.

The latest addition is the Department of Inhalation Therapy under the direction of one internist and a registered nurse trained in inhalation therapy and experienced in anesthesia. This nurse also supervises the administration of oxygen and other inhalants throughout the hospital including such devices as croup tents.

The third aspect of the hospital's operation is the hospital proper in which there are currently 181 beds situated in private,

semi-private, and ward rooms. (The hospital has a 250 bed capacity.) Most all of these have connecting baths. The wards in the Pediatric area have glass partitions separating each patient's compartment, and each of these has its own bath. One of the most useful features here is the child's bed and adult's bed so that the mother may stay with the child if necessary. Of the general medical and surgical areas, one floor of approximately twenty-four beds is devoted largely to the care of elderly female patients. Another with twenty-nine beds is for surgical cases and a similar floor of twenty-nine beds is devoted exclusively to medical patients. There is also a coronary care unit with six private rooms with adjoining baths. These rooms have heart monitors mounted on the wall outside the room for readily accessible observation by the attending nurse or physician.

An advertisement written by Dr. Davis appeared in a Statesville paper describing some of the firsts that he and his hospital had been responsible for. It was the first hospital in North Carolina and one of the first in the United States to install air-conditioning systems in its operating rooms. It had had organized blood-donor services for many years, and also had a blood bank very early in its history. It was one of the first in the United States to use glucose intravenously.

The hospital is fully accredited by the Joint Commission on Accreditation of Hospitals and has a cancer program approved by the American College of Surgeons. As of August 21, 1968 the hospital has complied with the Civil Rights Act and on the same date began accepting Medicare coverage for elderly and disabled patients. It is a voluntary,

nonprofit, general, short-term (over 50% of the patients admitted stay less than thirty days) hospital directed by a board of trustees. This board is composed of a Medical Director, a chairman, and an Executive Committee. For the past several years there have been approximately 7000 admissions annually and last year there were 462 births. There is an annual variation in this latter figure, however, according to the trend in the national birth rate. The average number of outpatients receiving care each year is 80,0004. In the twelve month period ending September 30, 1966 the ratio of the average number of inpatients receiving care each day to average number of beds maintained (the occupancy) was 64.6%. For the same recording period the total expense was $ 1,639,000 with a payroll of $ 1,098,000. Today total operating expenses have passed the 2.5 million mark annually. The number of personnel in the hospital, clinic, and school of nursing is about 350. Depending on the case load there are 70-80 registered nurses on the staff. There are fifteen full time physicians with offices in the hospital and a number of consultants and specialists who render their services to the hospital when necessary. Dr. J. Sam Holbrook is Chief of Staff; Dr. E. R. Caldwell, Chief of Medical Services; and Dr. L.R. Shaw, Chief of Obstetrics-Gynecology.

The biography written by Mr. Blythe includes an undated memo written by Dr. Davis. It is quite interesting and explains from his point of view the operation of the institution.

> This hospital is a permanent institution dedicated to the health and well-being of all the people who come here for treatment...It is the constant aim of Davis Hospital to keep abreast of the very latest developments in medicine, surgery, and all the different specialties, and to put these into operation so that our patients may have the benefit of them at the earliest possible moment.
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> All of the doctors here devote their entire time

> and attention to the patients in the hospital. They do not have any outside practice and no outside interests and for this reason they are able to devote their entire time and attention to the patients who are here in Davis Hospital. Likewise, when necessary, every patient has available the services of every doctor on the staff.

Today, though construction has changed the appearance considerably of the 1925 brick building, the same principles that started the hospital on December 18 of that year are still in effect unchanged. At the entrance of the old structure a permanent sign reads: "Everyone who comes here can expect kind and courteous treatment." Those who have sought medical care at Davis Hospital are aware that it is still observed to the letter.

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